judgement of the merits of the case. Concerning the proposed India-US civil nuclear energy cooperation agreement, the Foreign Secretary reaffirmed India's stand that both countries needed to work in the spirit of the 18 July, 2005 Joint Statement and in strict conformity with the reciprocal commitments contained therein. The Ambassador expressed his sincere regrets, saying that his remarks had been taken out of context, and that it was not his intention at all to question India's right to take decisions on the basis of its own national interests.

Award of Bhartiya Samman

*84. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there were protests against the award of Bhartiya Samman to certain awardees on the occasion of last Pravasi Bhartiya Meet;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) Yes, in respect of one Pravasi Bhartiya Samman awardee.

(b) A few oversea Indians in the audience had protested against conferring of the Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Award, 2006 on Dr. Sudhir Parikh.

(c) Dr. Sudhir Parikh had been approved for the Award keeping in view his contribution to the Indian-American community, championing US-India relations and philanthropy.

Increase of land rates for institutions

*85. SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Will the Minister of URBAN DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have decided to raise the land rates for institutions in Delhi; and

(b) if so, the details thereof along with the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT (SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY): (a) and (b) The allotment of institutional land is made by Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in terms of provision of the Delhi Development Authority (Disposal of Developed Nazul Land) Rules, 1981 as per rates approved by Government from time to time on the recommendations of the Authority. In so far as allotment of land for institutional purposes by Land & Development Office (L&DO) is concerned, the rates are fixed directly by the Central Government.

There has been no revision in the rates fixed for allotment of land for institutional purposes by L&DO since 1998-99. However, in respect of land allotted by DDA for institutional purposes, the rates have been revised from time to time based on the recommendation of the Authority. The last such revision was approved by Government for the year 2004-05. For the year 2005-06, the Authority has recommended further revision in respect of institutional zonal variant rates. This revision has been recommended taking into account the level of development, the trend of market rates of residential and commercial properties and the need to reduce the gap between market price and institutional rates.

Processing time for Visas

*86. SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that US State Department and Department of Homeland have announced a number of steps to expedite the processing time for visas;

(b) whether it is also a fact that US propose to issue student visas up to 120 days ahead of academic session; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI ANAND SHARMA): (a) The Government is aware that